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A DECADE OF FORUM EXCAVATION AND THE RESULTS FOR ROMAN HISTORY

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It is significant of the subtle and overpowering influence which "Old Rome" exerts upon all those who come into her life that when the "New Rome" of 1870 was born, when it looked as though all things had become new, the "New Rome" straightway set about the task of connecting herself with the "Old Rome" by organizing a series of important excavations. In the Forum these excavations continued for fifteen years, until 1885. They laid the foundations for our modern knowledge of the Forum, and upon them all recent work has been built up—or rather, to reverse the simile, they removed the crust, and made possible the deeper digging of the last decade. The names of Pietro Rosa and Rodolfo Lanciani are inseparably connected with these fifteen years, and as a third to complete the triumvirate comes the wise minister Baccelli, who co-operated with them in the adjustment of the traffic conditions of modern Rome so as to leave the Forum free.

After this busy campaign the inevitable reaction set in, and for thirteen years (1885-98) excavations were undertaken only occasionally, and usually at private initiative. But eventually this period of inactivity came to an end, and in December, 1898, the new epoch began, fittingly ushered in by the discovery of the altar in the front of the temple of Divus Julius. The guiding mind in this last decade has been Giacomo Boni, and the brilliant discoveries which have characterized these years have been largely owing to his peculiar intuition, though he would himself be the first to acknowledge his indebtedness to all previous excavation in so far as it had prepared the way.

It is highly profitable to study the Forum in its relation to Roman history, and possibly our best way to go about it will be to follow the

chronological order and to see from time to time what increment or correction the excavations of the last ten years have given us. We shall discover that the excavations in this one decade have affected our history for a period of a millennium and a half; and we shall have a graphic demonstration of the continuity of history on this spot, when we see discovered within a radius of a quarter of a mile a graveyard of the eighth century before Christ and a church from the eighth century after Christ.

Let us begin with the primitive or prehistoric period. It seems almost as though the peninsula of Italy had taken to heart Mommsen's unfortunate words, "Italy is singularly poor in memorials of the primitive period," and had determined to prove the contrary by opening up her hidden treasures. So much has been found in these latter years that the science of prehistoric anthropology looks to Italy as almost her foremost exponent; and the Forum has done its share. In April, 1902, an archaic tomb was discovered on the Sacra Via, near the temple of Antoninus Pius, and during the following summer and autumn an entire graveyard was laid bare. Again, in the autumn of the present year (1909) a further series of tombs was found in the same region. Well-tombs (*tombe a pozzo*) with ash-urns, and inhumation tombs with coffins (*tombe a cassa*) made of tree trunks were found side by side, sometimes one cutting into the other. Two important questions arose immediately: (1) the question of the date of this graveyard—if not the date of its beginning, at least that when it ceased to be used; (2) the question as to which of the early settlements buried its dead here.

Regarding the date it is impossible to establish a priority of cremation over inhumation or vice versa. The people who buried their dead here seem to have been accustomed to use both fashions side by side. It has been observed merely that a large proportion of the inhumation graves are those of children, and that adults seem usually to have been cremated. The date can be obtained merely by negative evidence. Gold is nowhere found, and silver in only one case. The pottery is mostly of local clay, the native manufacture of the so-called "Latian" type, black (*bucchero*) and red and yellow. Boni has succeeded in making similar vases from clay dug in the immediate neighborhood in the Forum. Such Greek vases as are

found belong to the "Proto-Corinthian" class and occur only in the most recent graves. The earliest tombs may easily be placed in the ninth (and possibly in the tenth) century, and the latest are not after the sixth (more probably the middle of the sixth) century. Fortunately there will not be found many scholars today to whom it will be a hardship to resign the belief that Rome was founded in B. C. 753. The Sepulcretum almost certainly proves what might in any case have readily been taken for granted, that there were settlements here before that date. The fact that the latest tombs are probably not later than B. C. 550 is in pleasing accord with our traditional chronology, that some time about that date this region was drained and a Forum was created.

Regarding the second question—to what primitive settlement the Sepulcretum belongs—our answer is not so satisfactory. Boni, observing that in those cases where the ash-urn is in the form of a miniature hut (*capanna*) the hut is so placed that the door faces east, would connect the Sepulcretum with the Velia. But the inference does not seem compulsory, and there is no real reason why this burying-place may not have belonged quite as well to the Quirinal. The whole question of the topography of primitive Rome is at present undergoing retreatment, and it is not impossible that the prevalent theory of the *synoikismos* with Roma Quadrata, Septimontium, etc., may be discarded in favor of a theory whereby a number of small settlements on the hilltops formed a primitive league until the middle of the sixth century, when the Etruscans conquering this league surrounded these *oppida* by a wall, drew the *pomoerium* outside this wall, and thus established the city proper (*urbs*) which at that time received from the Etruscans its name, *Roma*. Unfortunately the Sepulcretum in the Forum suits either theory, for in either case at this period it would be outside the inclosed precinct, whether Rome was a collection of small walled *oppida* or a city proper in the shape of the hypothetical Septimontium.

The discovery of the Sepulcretum is in certain respects the most interesting find of the last decade, but it is by no means the most sensational. It has aroused only a tithe of the interest called forth by the discovery of the Lapis Niger. It may well be doubted whether this excessive interest is justified or not, but of its existence there can

be no doubt. The magic of the name of Romulus accounts for most of it.

As the story of Romulus is only one of three legends which have been brought into prominence by the recent excavations, it will be well to consider for a moment the whole question of Roman legends and what we may reasonably expect any modern excavation to perform in their behalf. In recent times it has become increasingly clear that no Roman legend known to us has any strong claim to antiquity. We may not be justified in asserting that early Rome possessed no legends, though we may think it extremely probable that her legend-making powers were very limited, but we are justified in the assertion that in the case of the great majority of legends known to us we are in a position to establish roughly the date of their origin, and we find it to have been almost always under Greek influence, and not before the beginning or the middle of the fourth century B. C. They are not, however, on that account devoid of value, but are on the contrary of great value, reflecting the conditions of the time in which they were produced, namely the fourth century (and in the case of certain lesser legends, possibly the fifth century). It is not reasonable to expect, therefore, that the spade in the Forum will undo this condition of affairs. At most we can hope that it will throw some light on the period when these legends arose.

On January 10, 1899, a pavement of black marble was discovered in front of the Curia and not far from the arch of Severus, but it was not until the end of May that the structures beneath it, including the archaic inscription, were discovered. These structures consisted of two parts: (1) a stele with an inscription, referring in some way to the *rex* (either the real king or his successor, the *rex sacrorum*) and a *calator*, or priest's servant, and coming from a period not later than the Decemvirate; and a broken stone cone of uncertain age; (2) the so-called sacellum—two bases parallel to each other and abutting at right angles against a rectangular structure.

A host of explanations arose immediately, but one of them soon prevailed over all the others. It was interpreted as the grave of Romulus in the Comitium, which Festus tells us was marked by a black stone. This is still the prevalent view. Accepting it for the moment, let us inquire what relation it would bear to the question of

the existence of Romulus. It was expected that to the lay mind it would seem proof positive of the historical character of Romulus. But a closer consideration would disclose, even to those who are not familiar with the subject, the fact that the existence of a monument called "the grave of Romulus" would prove at most the existence of a belief in Romulus on the part of those who thus venerated a spot supposed to be his grave. Romulus might still be a legend, and our new discovery would simply prove the existence of that legend at an early date.

As a matter of fact, however, it has been proved almost beyond doubt that the legend of Romulus was not known in Rome before the fourth century; nor is it necessary to interpret this group of monuments so as to connect them with Romulus. They may well represent simply an altar in the comitium, and the inscription would then be merely the *lex arae*. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility that at a much later date, when their original purpose had been forgotten, they might have been associated with Romulus in the popular mind. The people of this latter day would not be able to read the inscription, and hence the name of Romulus might supposedly be found upon it.

But while not associated with Romulus as such, the monuments in question are very probably connected with the kingly period. The altar may be that at which the king sacrificed on March 24 and May 24, referred to in the calendar as *Q R C F*, which meant *Quando rex comitiavit, fas*. Possibly it may also have been the site of the *regifugium* of February 24.

But the Romulus legend is not the only one which has been brought into discussion by these recent discoveries. At least two other legends, that of Curtius, and that of Castor and Pollux, have been recalled to mind.

The legend of Curtius has been delivered to us in three forms. If we arrange them, not according to the date of their origin, but merely according to the period with which they deal, we have: first, the legend of the Sabine Mettus or Mettius Curtius, who was caught in a swamp during the battle between Romulus and Titus Tatius; second, the story of Gaius Curtius, who in the year 445 caused a well curb to be put about the spot in the Forum where lightning had struck;

third, the legend of Marcus Curtius, who in the year B. C. 362 performed a *devotio*, riding on horseback into the chasm in the Forum, and thus causing the chasm to close. So far as the antiquity of these legends is concerned, the order is exactly the reverse. The legend of Mettius Curtius is the latest to arise. It is merely an attempt to substitute a more picturesque explanation for the incident of Gaius Curtius, which may well have had a historical foundation. The legend of Marcus Curtius and the chasm seems sufficiently quaint to justify us in ascribing to it a very great age. It may well have been the oldest legend, for which a later age attempted to substitute the prosaic story of Gaius Curtius and his puteal.

In the discoveries of the last decade we have a confirmation of these suggestions. In the spring of 1904 the Lacus Curtius itself was discovered between the base of Domitian's statue and one of the brick bases of Diocletian, underneath the travertine pavement of the Empire. The plinth and the foundations of the puteal testify to its existence; and the trapezoidal structure which surrounds it seems to mark the original *lacus*, which was afterward filled in. It is not impossible that there may have existed here originally a chasm, caused by volcanic action, which was subsequently drained and filled up, giving rise to the veneration of the spot, as a door of the lower world, a *mundus*, like the real "Roma Quadrata" on the Palatine, into which offerings must regularly be cast.

In the spring of 1900, in connection with the destruction of S. Maria Liberatrice, the Lacus Juturnae came to light between the temple of Castor and the Palatine. The find was expected, because the *lacus* was known to have been in close proximity to the temple of Castor, and to the region of Vesta; and the memory of its existence was preserved in the sixteenth century in the name of the church S. Silvestro in lacu. Nevertheless, the excavations were surprising in the wealth of material which was preserved. The spring itself came to light, with its Republican bottom and the gradual adaptations which occurred as the ground level of the Forum was raised. There was found also a beautiful marble altar with Castor and Pollux on one of the long sides, Helen on the other, on one of the short sides Jupiter, on the other Leda. Near it was a small chapel (*aedicula*) of Juturna, and a well with a well head. The well doubtless came into being

at the time when the rise in the ground level made access to the *lacu* itself difficult. The well head dates from the Augustan age. The real value of these finds consists, however, simply in this, that they bear eloquent testimony to the fact that Greek myths once adopted by Rome rose quickly into the position of orthodox dogmas. The two "sons of God," Castor and Pollux, had come into southern Italy from Greece, and had moved northward into Latium in connection with the mounted infantry (*hoplites*). They had for some reason unknown to us been especially well received at Tusculum, and from Tusculum their cult had advanced into Rome. A late legend, borrowed bodily from Greek sources, reflects the process. At the battle of Lake Regillus, itself an entirely mythical event, the Romans were fighting against Octavius Mamurius of Tusculum. Suddenly there appeared two young men of more than mortal beauty mounted on white horses, who led the Roman forces to victory. When the battle was over, they were not to be found. But at the same hour, toward sunset, two young men on white horses appeared in the Roman Forum and watered their wearied steeds at the spring of Juturna. They brought news of victory to the Romans and then disappeared as suddenly as they had come. The story is none the less beautiful because it is directly copied from a Greek legend, localized in the battle of the Locrians against the people of Crotona at the river Sagra. It is rather on that account the more interesting, and the discovery of the spring of Juturna with the altar of the Dioscuri in its midst shows how absolutely this foreign legend, once adopted by Rome, had become an orthodox part of Roman belief.

The history of the Republic, except in its very latest phases, has received no large increment during these ten years. However, a certain number of inscriptions have been found, notably a fragment of the *Fasti Capitolini*. During the last two years Commendatore Boni has been exploring a Republican house, situated opposite the Basilica of Constantine, and we may have a reminder of the Bacchanalian process of B. C. 186, in the cellar chamber with its frescoes of *thyrsoi*, and the mysterious pit which might well have served to receive the bodies of the victims.

In the transition period of Caesar and Augustus, however, the results have been most interesting. At the very beginning of the

decade, excavations at S. Adriano laid bare the façade of the Curia as Julius Caesar built it. In the same neighborhood the ruins of the Rostra of the Empire were disclosed, and the most recent study of these remains seems to show that Julius Caesar's own Rostra stood on the same spot, and that thus at last we have located the site where Antony delivered his famous speech. But the most interesting of the reminders of Julius Caesar which have come to the light in these latter years is the discovery of the place where his body was burned. It had long been known that the temple of the Divus Julius was built on the site where this event had occurred. Jordan with his remarkable intuition had even suspected that the semicircular projection in front of the concrete core might well have contained the altar; but it was reserved for Boni to tear away the roughly built wall and disclose the altar itself.

The tale which the Forum tells us of Augustus is the same tale which has been told in all time for those who had ears to hear, the all-pervading character of his reign; and the "new" Forum which has resulted in these ten years is in all essential things the creation of Augustus. To study it in detail is to see the marks of his activity on all sides, and to realize that while Hadrian did much for the Velia and the Sacra Via, it was Augustus who gave the Forum proper its final and definite shape. That Augustus' influence lived after him is seen most clearly in the memorials which his successors built for him, notably the temple and the library of Augustus. The excavations of 1900 and 1901 have laid bare the remains of these two buildings. The original identification of the brick walls situated near S. Maria Liberatrice as the temple of Augustus has been proved correct, and between it and the Palatine underneath S. Maria Liberatrice was found the Bibliotheca Augusti. A much more remarkable thing was also found, namely, S. Maria Antiqua, of which we shall speak later.

Of the discoveries which belong in the period of the early Empire, none has such wide-reaching results as that of the base of the equestrian statue of Domitian. The concrete base itself situated near the Lacus Curtius is of no extraordinary significance. A very high degree of importance, however, attaches to a discovery which was made in this foundation itself. Here was found a block of travertine hollowed out in the center and containing five apparently archaic

clay vases, similar to those which were discovered in the Sepulcretum. At first it was thought that these were the remains of an ancient grave which had been found when the ground was excavated for the concrete substructure of the statue, and that in respect for the sanctity of the tomb, they had been allowed to remain on the same spot, merely being inclosed in a block of travertine. But in the first place the absence of any bones or ashes, which must surely have been present in the case of a grave, and in the second place the improbability that Roman ritual would allow a grave to be treated in this casual way, make this theory very doubtful. Gatti has made the interesting suggestion that the block represents the ancient parallel of our modern cornerstone, and that the vases which it contained were merely ritual vases, contemporary reproductions of archaic models. Many things speak in favor of this theory, among others the remarkable preservation of the vases in question, which seem to have been absolutely new when they were placed in the block.

But if this theory be correct, it opens up a very serious problem for our chronology of supposedly early Roman finds. If these archaic forms were still reproduced under the Empire, and if the reproductions were so skilful as to be undistinguishable from the originals, pottery must be used with the greatest caution in establishing chronology. In a sense this is the most important lesson which the recent Forum excavations have to teach the historian.

Modern investigation in the Forum has been undertaken avowedly in the interests of classical antiquity, and so strong has this determination been that the monuments of the Middle Ages, wherever they seemed to interfere, were compelled to yield. In certain cases, where this interference was more seeming than real, we may regret this course of action; but in the one case where the storm of protest was loudest, the destruction of S. Maria Liberatrice, it was after all the mediaevalists who were the direct gainers thereby. The classical topographer found, to be sure, the building which had been the library of Augustus, but he found it not as a pagan library, but as a Christian church, the long lost church of S. Maria Antiqua, which had ceased to exist in the ninth century, but which now was restored to our vision, with its unique frescoes of the seventh and the eighth centuries.

Thus the Forum excavation has taught once again that which is perhaps the greatest lesson which Rome has to teach, namely, the continuity of history, and the folly of attaching any real value to dividing lines. It is by good fortune this very continuity which makes the present the heir of the past, and which therefore elevates the study of the past into an essential discipline for the present.